

VINTAGE SCOTT

*Picked up at
Waterloo*

Scott on Waterloo



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About the Book

'Rags of clothes and fragments of books and papers strewn the ground in great profusion, especially where the action had been most bloody'
Walter Scott on the field of Waterloo.

In the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo tourists flocked from Britain to witness the scene of the most important conflict of their generation. Walter Scott was among them, and with a commission from his publisher for a travel book and a long poem. These prose and verse accounts bring to vivid life the carnage, spectacle and excitement of a fascinating period of European history.

Brilliantly introduced and annotated by Paul O'Keeffe, this edition elucidates and contextualises Scott's first-hand account of his travels, his dashing epic, 'The Field of Waterloo' and the eerily chilling 'Dance of Death'.

About the Author

Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh on 15 August 1777. He was educated in Edinburgh and called to the bar in 1792, succeeding his father as Writer to the Signet, then Clerk of Session. He published anonymous translations of German Romantic poetry from 1797, in which year he also married. In 1805 he published his first major work, a romantic poem called *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and became a partner in a printing business. Several other long poems followed, including *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). These poems found acclaim and great popularity, but from 1814 and the publication of *Waverley*, Scott turned almost exclusively to novel-writing, albeit anonymously. A hugely prolific period of writing produced over twenty-five novels, including *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), *Kenilworth* (1821) and *Redgauntlet* (1824). Already sheriff-depute of Selkirkshire, Scott was created a baronet in 1820. The printing business in which Scott was a partner ran into financial difficulties in 1826, and Scott devoted his energies to work in order to repay the firm's creditors, publishing many more novels, dramatic works, histories and a life of Napoleon Bonaparte. Sir Walter Scott died on 21 September 1832 at Abbotsford, the home he had built on the Scottish Borders.

Paul O'Keeffe's books include biographies of Wyndham Lewis (*Some Sort of Genius*, 2000), Gaudier Brzeska (*An Absolute Case of Genius*, 2004) and Benjamin Robert Haydon (*A Genius for Failure*, 2009). He has also edited a scholarly edition of Wyndham Lewis's first novel *Tarr: the 1918 Version* (1990). His most recent book is the critically

acclaimed *Waterloo: The Aftermath* (2014). He lives in Liverpool.

ALSO BY WALTER SCOTT

The Lay of the Last Minstrel

Marmion

The Lady of the Lake

The Bridal of Triermain

Waverley

Guy Mannering

The Antiquary

Old Mortality

Rob Roy

Ivanhoe

The Heart of Midlothian

The Bride of Lammermoor

Kenilworth

Redgauntlet

WALTER SCOTT

Scott on Waterloo

EDITED, ANNOTATED AND INTRODUCED BY
Paul O'Keeffe

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

General Introduction

Anxiously awaited news of the battle arrived in Edinburgh by mail coach on the morning of Saturday 24 June 1815. It came in the form of an express letter, sent from Westminster at 1.30 a.m. on the 22nd by the Lord Provost, Sir John Marjoribanks, MP for Bute. The Duke of Wellington's dispatch, and two captured French eagle standards, had reached London only a couple of hours earlier carried by Major Henry Percy, his uniform still soiled by travel and a fellow officer's blood. 'As the feelings of those who have near relatives in the army must be on the stretch,' wrote the Lord Provost, 'I cannot help gratifying the inhabitants of the good town [of Edinburgh] with the communication ... of the greatest intelligence that ever came to Britain.'^{fn1} For the rest of that Saturday every church bell in the Scottish capital was rung by order of the Magistrates, and at six o'clock the following morning a cannon salvo from the castle battlements announced the victory to anyone still ignorant of it.

But with news of victory came awareness of the terrible cost and on 27 June, at a meeting of concerned citizens in the Parliament House, a motion was proposed that a fund be established to relieve 'the wants of the Widows and Children of those who have been slain'.

The forty-three-year-old Walter Scott seconded the motion and 'trusted that the inhabitants of this city, who were never backward to calls of charity, would cheerfully contribute to alleviate the distresses occasioned by so glorious a cause'.^{fn2} Such trust in the generosity of his

fellow citizens did not, however, prevent his playing upon the emotions and pricking the conscience of his audience:

How many of the Gallant Men who have fallen ... must have been soothed in the moment of death, by reflecting that those who were dependent on their lives, would now become a legacy to their grateful Country! How many more of our brave Defenders must we be prepared to see return to their native land, deprived by honourable wounds! of the means of following either a military or a peaceful profession! To the exertions of these brave men we owe the safety, the comfort, the luxuries which we here enjoy; and he who can hear unmoved the appeal now made, not to our Liberality, but to our Justice, is unworthy of sharing those advantages which their blood has purchased, and the fame which their exertions has acquired for their Country.

The four largest single donations pledged at the meeting – of a hundred guineas each – came from the City of Edinburgh, the Earl of Wemyss, the Duke of Buccleuch, and from Scott himself. As a successful author of poetry, and of two equally successful – though anonymous – novels, *Waverley*, which had appeared in 1814, and *Guy Mannering*, published only the previous February, he ascribed to the liberality of his publishers his ability to contribute such a sum. It was a sum ‘far indeed below [his] wishes’, he explained, ‘but yet more commensurate with these than with the limitations of [his] ordinary income’ as an advocate at the Scottish bar and Sheriff-Depute for Selkirkshire. He likened his case to that of an actor, enabled by the public’s indulgence and appreciation of his talents to give the proceeds of a performance ‘for the benefit of those sufferers in whom [that public was] so deeply and justly interested’.^{fn3}

It was not until early July that Scott decided to make what would be the first foreign excursion of his life, and with the principal purpose of visiting the field of Waterloo. His journey would result in two books: one in prose called *Paul’s Letters to His Kinsfolk* – like his novels published anonymously – the other in verse and with the author’s profits from its first edition donated to the Waterloo Fund.

He later claimed that his determination to visit Belgium was 'if not fixed, much quickened' by reading a letter sent from Brussels by the surgeon Charles Bell to his brother, who forwarded a copy to Scott. Reading it 'set [him] on fire'. The surgeon wrote of a city 'ornamented with the finest groups of armed men that the most romantic fancy could dream of'; he wrote of the French wounded, 'exhausted, beaten ... [but] men capable of marching unopposed from the west of Europe to the east of Asia ... strong, thickset, hardy veterans, brave spirits and unsubdued ... their wild glance ... their black eyes ...' But perhaps the passage that most fired Scott's imagination was Bell's account of a Brunswick officer, dressed entirely in black except for the silver death's head emblazoned on his shako, riding into town from the battle of Quatre Bras on 16 June:

He was wounded, and had had his arm amputated on the field. He was among the first that came in. He rode straight and stark upon his horse - the bloody clouts about his stump - pale as death, but upright, with a stern fixed expression of feature, as if loth to lose his revenge.

It must have seemed, to the imaginative chronicler of Bannockburn, Prestonpans and Flodden, a timeless image of martial heroism; small wonder that the Romantic novelist and poet grasped the opportunity 'of seeing probably the last shadows of real warfare that his own age would afford'.^{fn4}

Scott was enthralled by war and it has been suggested that, had he not been crippled, aged eighteen months, by a then undiagnosed fever - known later as infantile paralysis, today as poliomyelitis - he might have followed an army career like his elder brother, John. Even lame, in 1797, he was instrumental in forming the Royal Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons, a body of gentlemanly amateurs with military hankerings, of which he was elected quartermaster and secretary. One of many militia groups mustered at that

time in anticipation of French invasion, the Volunteers spent their time drilling, slicing turnips in half at the gallop, and charging along Portobello beach. And, doubtless, round their campfire they chanted the 'War Song' their quartermaster and secretary had composed for them:

To horse! To horse! The sabres gleam;
High sounds our bugle-call;
Combined by honour's sacred tie,
Our word is *Laws and Liberty!*
March forward, one and all!^{fn5}

The only time they were mobilised in earnest, however, was against their own countrymen. In May 1800, local militia were called out when 'starving & very tumultuously disposed' mobs attacked property in Edinburgh and its environs, protesting against the high price of oats. Scott's corps undertook patrol duty at a mill in Moredun, south-east of the city. They were 'pelted & much insulted' but provoked neither to pistol shot nor sabre stroke - though when a rioter seized his horse's reins Scott was momentarily tempted to relieve him of his fingers.^{fn6}

He would have left Edinburgh for the Continent sooner had he not been obliged to attend a friend's wedding on 24 July, but at five in the morning of the 27th, leaving his wife and children at home in Abbotsford, he set out with three companions: his kinsman John Scott of Gala; Alexander Pringle, the future MP for Selkirkshire; and the advocate Robert Bruce.

On 31 July, before Scott and his party had even boarded the cutter at Harwich that would take them to the Dutch port of Helvoetsluys, the *Caledonian Mercury* carried an announcement:

IN THE PRESS
And speedily will be published ...
Price 3s 6d.
THE FIELD OF WATERLOO.
A POEM.
by WALTER SCOTT Esq.

Not a word of it had thus far been written.

The travellers made a brief stop at Bergen-op-Zoom to examine the fortifications - besieged by the French in 1747 and by the English, disastrously, in 1814 - before proceeding to Antwerp on 6 August. Here they encountered British troops for the first time. At the cathedral they saw where Rubens' *Elevation of the Cross* and *Deposition* had hung prior to seizure by the French in 1794, the spaces 'still vacant to remind the citizens of their loss'.^{fn7} John Scott of Gala spoke for many of his Presbyterian countrymen when he remarked that 'to persons ... who had not been accustomed to see pictures in places of worship, the blank was not offensive'.^{fn8} On 7 August they left Antwerp for Brussels and two days later made the pilgrimage for which their entire expedition might be said to have been a pretext.

Walter Scott was the first celebrity, but by no means the first civilian, to visit the field of Waterloo. Sightseers with strong stomachs had begun arriving from Brussels on the morning after the battle, when the mangled dead and dying lay in heaps and the work of clearing the wounded had barely begun. During the remainder of June and throughout July, the curious continued to visit. Many picked up souvenirs from the ground, still strewn with debris discarded as worthless by looters. A particular fascination was the ubiquitous litter - Bible pages, playing cards, letters - turned out from dead men's pockets in the search for money and valuables. Scott took home with him a

couple of crumpled leaves of a German prayer book and an example of the most commonplace item, a *livret militaire*, or account book, carried by every French soldier. It contained 'the state of his pay and equipments ... the occasions on which he served and distinguished himself ... the punishments, if any, which he had incurred' and 'a list of the duties of the private soldier, amongst which is that of knowing how to dress his victuals, and particularly to make good soup'.^{fn9} More substantial trophies could be bought from the local peasantry and the back plate of a French cuirass, punctured by a musket ball, purchased for five francs was brought back to Abbotsford, along with an ornate, inlaid breastplate that had cost four times as much in Brussels.

By early August the last of the wounded had been brought in and the dead buried or burned along with the horse carcasses. But the summer's heat baked the thousands of corpses beneath their thin covering of earth and every tourist complained of the stench and the carrion flies. Scott thought it 'wonderful that a pestilential disease ha[d] not broken out, to sum up the horrors of the campaign'.^{fn10} Yet despite an awareness of the 'ghastly evidences', he could still find stirring parallels, in the stories told him of the battle, to more romantically distanced conflicts like Bannockburn and Flodden. 'Many of the blows dealt ... seemed borrowed from the annals of knight-errantry,' his protagonist Paul writes, 'for several of the corpses exhibited heads cloven to the chine, or severed from the shoulders',^{fn11} the occasional retention of an archaic spelling adding lustre to the carnage. Nevertheless, when *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk* was published in January 1816, containing a sixty-page description of the battle, Scott was flattered to be told that an officer on the General Staff, 'who ... was well acquainted with the scene ... considered the account ... as given in that production of

an unknown author to be the best and most correct that had yet been published'.^{fn12}

Scott's party left Brussels the day after their tour of the battlefield and journeyed on by way of Mons, then across the French border, passing through Valenciennes, Péronne and Chantilly to Paris. They travelled in the wake of two invasion forces – Wellington's Anglo-Allied army, composed of Belgian, Brunswick, Dutch and Hanoverian, as well as British, regiments, and Blücher's Prussians. Each army displayed a markedly different attitude to the country they marched through. Acutely aware, ever since the Peninsular Campaign, of the advantages of maintaining good relations with a civilian population, Wellington had reminded the troops under his command that their war had been waged against 'the Usurper' Napoleon on behalf of the French King Louis XVIII and that, therefore, France was to be regarded, and treated, 'as a friendly country'. Plunder was forbidden and nothing was to be taken, from farms and villages, 'for which payment be not made'.^{fn13} Prussian troops, by contrast, were under no such restriction or obligation. They had endured French occupation – following their defeat at the Battle of Jena – and so had 'greater wrongs to revenge'. As they swept towards Paris the Prussian conquerors' right of pillage was carried to vindictive lengths. Paul's account of the destruction, and the means used for breaking and entering, has a forensic precision betraying neither approval nor censure:

As the peasants had left their cottages locked up, the soldiers as regularly broke them open, by discharging a musket through the keyhole and shattering the wards at once by the explosion. He who obtains admission by such violent preliminaries is not likely to be a peaceable or orderly guest; and accordingly furniture broken and destroyed, windows dashed in, doors torn down, and now and then a burned cottage [was seen, as well as] hamlets, deserted by such of the terrified inhabitants as were able to fly, and tenanted only by the aged and disabled.^{fn14}

Of the French people Scott encountered, 'the few men look very sulky', he wrote, 'and if you speak three words to a woman, she is sure to fall a-crying'.^{fn15}

There were reckoned to be, if not quite a million foreign soldiers in occupied France, then certainly 800,000, 'an assembly of troops', observes Paul, 'scarce paralleled save in the annals of romance'. And the greatest concentration lay in Paris. This 'immense garrison'^{fn16} afforded military splendour far surpassing that claimed by Charles Bell for Brussels. By the time Scott and his companions reached the French capital on 14 August it was occupied not only by the Anglo-Allied and Prussian forces but by those of the Austrian and Russian empires as well.

Paul confesses to an 'inherent partiality' for the society of soldiers. At a dinner given by Lord Cathcart to honour Tsar Alexander, Scott was able not only to indulge that partiality, but to participate vicariously, dressing up in the black boots, white leather breeches and scarlet coat with blue trimmings and silver lace of the Royal Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons. Unfamiliar with the uniform, but noticing that Scott dragged his polio-wasted leg, the Tsar asked him in which 'affair' he had been wounded. Scott explained that he suffered from a natural infirmity.

'I thought Lord Cathcart mentioned that you had served,' the Tsar pursued.

'Oh yes,' Scott replied, 'in a certain sense I have served - that is, in the yeomanry cavalry.'

'Were you ever engaged?'

Scott was enjoying himself and would dine out on this conversation for years to come ...

'In some slight actions,' he replied, thinking of the stick-and-stone street fights of his Edinburgh boyhood and the Volunteers' riot control duty of 1800, 'slight actions such as the battle of the Cross Causeway and the affair at Moredun-Mill.'

At this point Lord Cathcart diplomatically moved the conversation in another direction.

At dinner Scott sat next to Count Platov, the Cossack commander. 'The Hetman addressed several sentences to me in his own language in a very obliging manner,' he recalled, 'to which I replied in English, taking care to make my answer nearly of the same length as his own speech; and with this I was glad to perceive he was perfectly satisfied.' Some days later the Cossack recognised his dinner companion in the street, dismounted from his horse, 'and, running up to him, kissed him on each side of the cheek with extraordinary demonstrations of affection'.^{fn17}

On 31 August, at Platov's invitation - although not astride 'the gentlest of Ukrainian horses'^{fn18} he had promised - Scott watched as 20,000 Russian troops passed in review before their Tsar and other heads and representatives of the Allied Powers. Rank after rank marched across the Place de la Concorde, in front of the saluting platform erected close to the site on which the last French king had been guillotined. From where he stood Scott could see the length of the Champs-Élysées, stretching back, 'like a glowing furnace',^{fn19} as the sunlight reflected off the dense moving hedge of bayonets. It was a display of military power by their conquerors that understandably attracted few French observers.

In common with other foreigners - civilian and military - making Paris their temporary home, Scott and his party were eager to see the Louvre and the vast collection of masterpieces that Napoleon had amassed, by force of conquest, from across Europe. They had made their first visit on the day they arrived, with a sense of urgency after being told that the plundered works were shortly to be returned to their countries of origin. Despite a quantity of statues and paintings, claimed by Prussia, having already left Paris in July, the collection that Scott saw on that first

occasion remained for the time being largely intact. He was able to see Rubens' two great altar pieces, whose absence he had noted in Antwerp, as well as Raphael's *Transfiguration*, the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Laocoön*, belonging to the Vatican. There were signs, however, that their days in France were numbered.

The hammer and wedge have given awful note of preparation; the Venus, the Dying Gladiator, and many other statues, have been loosened from their pedestals, and stand prompt for returning to their native and appropriate places of abode.^{fn20}

By the end of August the Austrians were making their claims. 'The pictures are disappearing fast from the Louvre,' Scott wrote to his wife, 'near three hundred have been packed off since I came here.'^{fn21} But the more important and - for the Parisians - more emotive restitutions were to begin after Scott had left. He did not witness the occupation of the Louvre by British troops on 23 September, when the Duke of Wellington lent his support to the seizure of the Antwerp pictures on behalf of the King of the Netherlands; he did not see English engineers enforce the Austrian Emperor's claim by lowering the Venetian Horses from the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel a week later; nor did he watch, in October, as the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Medici Venus* were crated for Rome, crowning the diplomatic efforts of Sir William Hamilton and the foreign secretary, Lord Castlereagh. Such actions were to sour the comparatively good relations between the Parisians and the British, prompting one observer to declare that Wellington's laurels had been tarnished thereby and 'the glory of the battle of Waterloo ... effaced by the storming of the Louvre'.^{fn22}

Towards the end of August Scott was feeling jaded. Just days before being dazzled by the massed weapons of the Russian army in the Place de la Concorde he had made a significant admission to his wife: 'I think I have seen

enough of military doings which after all it is as well to read of as to witness.'^{fn23} He decided not to attend the much bigger Russian review that was to take place in mid-September on the plain of Vertus to the east of Paris when no fewer than 150,000 men, including 36,000 cavalry, and 400 cannon would be on parade. 'I find going there would be attended with much difficulty,' he told Charlotte, '& I have seen great shews of the kind of late so I shall cut it.'^{fn24}

He had turned forty-four in Paris and began 'to tire to get home'.^{fn25}

Not only had the Duke been 'most uncommonly kind' to Scott during his stay in Paris but 'so [had] all his military family'. And the valediction the author wrote for Paul on leaving the city suggested that he had felt himself under the personal protection of the British army:

In such society, whatever secret discontents might in reality exist, Paris was to us like a frozen lake, over whose secret and fathomless gulphs we could glide without danger or apprehension ...^{fn26}

Only four days after Scott's departure, however, he learned that for others the ice had been all too thin. 'We have left Paris in time,' he wrote from the safety of Brighton. 'They have begun to murder the English, one poor young man was stabbed on the Boulevards. Prussian men & officers are wounded or killed every now & then.'^{fn27}

On his arrival at Abbotsford he discovered that his 'charger' - a reminder of his service with the Volunteers - had formed an inexplicable antipathy to him in his absence. This pure white stallion called Daisy 'looked askant at [Scott] like a devil' and would not allow him to mount, throwing him to the ground each time he tried. After several attempts he was forced to sell the high-mettled creature to John Ballantyne. 'Wars and rumours of wars being over,' he said later, 'I resolved thenceforth to have

done with such dainty blood. I now stick to a good sober cob.’^{fn28} His journey had been a senior rite of passage. He had left Scotland a cavalryman *manqué*, his Light Dragoon’s uniform carefully packed in his luggage; he returned transformed – at least in his own eyes – to the ‘cross old bachelor’, Paul. And of his next novel, published May 1816, he would write that ‘among the numerous creatures of my Imagination the author has had a particular partiality for the Antiquary.’^{fn29} It featured another self-portrait: the eponymous, bookish, garrulous buffer, Jonathan Oldbuck.

^{fn1} *Caledonian Mercury*, 24 June 1815.

^{fn2} *Ibid.*, 29 June 1815.

^{fn3} *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 30 June 1815.

^{fn4} John Gibson Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: 1902) volume V, pp. 49–52.

^{fn5} ‘War Song of the Royal Edinburgh Light Dragoons’ (1802), *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: 1894), p. 701.

^{fn6} Scott to Richard Heber, 5 May 1800, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (London: 1933) volume XII, p. 160.

^{fn7} *Paul’s Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Letter X, p. 161.

^{fn8} John Scott, *Journal of a Tour to Waterloo and Paris, in company with Sir Walter Scott in 1815* (London, Saunders, and Otley: 1842), p. 26.

^{fn9} *Paul’s Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Letter IX, p. 41.

^{fn10} *Ibid.*, p. 144.

^{fn11} *Ibid.*, Letter VIII, p. 115.

^{fn12} Sir John Malcom to Scott, *Letters IV*, p. 78, footnote 2.

^{fn13} ‘General Order, Nivelles’, June 1815, *The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, during his various campaigns from 1799 to 1815* (London: 1838), vol. 12, p. 493.

^{fn14} *Paul’s Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Letter XI, p. 182.

^{fn15} Scott to his Grace the Duke of Buccleuch, August, *Letters IV*, p. 78.

^{fn16} Scott to Archibald Constable, 5 September, *Letters IV*, p. 89.

^{fn17} *Life V*, p. 76.

^{fn18} *Ibid.*

^{fn19} Scott to Joanna Baillie, *Letters IV*, p. 95.

^{fn20} *Paul’s Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Letter XIII, p. 227.

^{fn21} To Mrs Scott, late August 1815 *Letters XII*, p. 147.

^{fn22} Lady Malmesbury quoted in *Memoirs of Sir Lowry Cole*, ed. Maud Lowry Cole and Stephen Gwynn (London: 1934) p. 179.

- fn23 To Mrs Scott, late August, *Letters XII*, p. 147.
- fn24 To Mrs Scott, 6 September, *Letters XII*, p. 149.
- fn25 To Mrs Scott, late August, *Letters XII*, p. 146.
- fn26 *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Letter XVI, p. 303.
- fn27 To Mrs Scott, 13 September, *Letters XII*, p. 150.
- fn28 *Life V*, p. 86.
- fn29 Scott to Basil Hall, 27 October 1831, *Letters XII*, p.37.

Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk

Introduction

Walter Scott's tour of Holland, Belgium and France in the late July, August and early September of 1815 was to be subsidised by the account he intended writing of it. Precise business plans had been formulated before leaving Edinburgh, and, on the day he set out, his printer, John Ballantyne, wrote to three publishers - Archibald Constable, Thomas Longman and John Murray - inviting each to undertake payment of equal shares in printing costs; each to receive one-third of an initial print run of 3,000 copies, thereby taking equal shares in half the profits, of a 352-page book retailing at eight shillings a copy. Scott himself would receive the other half profit: a projected £450. The work would comprise 'a series of letters [from the Continent] on a peculiar plan, varied in matter and style, and to different supposititious correspondents'.^{fn1}

Scott's 'peculiar plan' for what was to be published as *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk* was a travel book purporting to be written and addressed, thematically, to five individuals, each having a particular interest and receiving 'that species of information with which each is most gratified'. An unmarried sister, Margaret, was to be informed of all the general and personal details of her beloved brother's travels; an unnamed cousin, the retired Major, would be given details of military affairs; Peter, another cousin, was to be 'refreshed with politics'; the local Laird would be apprised of agricultural matters and 'the

general state of the country'; and, finally, a Parson was to be told of the moral and religious state of post-revolutionary France. As ostensibly 'supposititious' as his correspondents, the author - 'a cross old bachelor' - was named Paul, recalling the epistolary evangelist.

With the exception of 'Cousin Peter', for whom no specific model has been identified, the correspondents were based on people known to Scott. His fifty-six-year-old maiden aunt Christian ('Chrattie') Rutherford provided the original for Paul's sister. The 'Laird' was modelled on the agriculturist John Southey, Lord Somerville, who had served as President of the Board of Agriculture in William Pitt's administration between 1798 and 1800. The 'Minister of the Gospel' was based on the Reverend Dr Robert Douglas of Galashiels, a man of 'sterling worth' and 'humorous conversation',^{fn2} from whom Scott bought the farm - known locally as 'Clarty Hole' - that he had renamed, and was to rebuild, as Abbotsford. Finally, the 'Major' was based on Scott's elder brother John, although his career and that of Paul's kinsman were far from parallel. The 'Major' is said to have assisted in the defence of Bergen-op-Zoom when it was besieged by the French in 1747 during the War of the Austrian Succession, more than twenty years before John Scott was born. Similarly, John would have been only six years old when Paul's cousin is supposed to have fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775 during the American War of Independence. Little is known of John's military career but it was not distinguished. He had remained a Captain in the British army for over fifteen years during a period in which his country had been continuously at war and prospects of advancement excellent. Then, in 1809, his brother Walter pulled strings in the War Office and got him belatedly promoted to Major. Shortly thereafter he sold his commission and settled down to comfortable alcoholic retirement and declining digestive health. John Scott would

survive the publication of *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk* by a matter of months, dying in early May 1816.

Writing of the book was intended to begin 'immediately on [Scott's] arrival in France', towards mid-August, and it was to be published 'if possible, the second week of September, when he propose[d] to return'.^{fn3} That schedule could only have been possible if Scott had been able to write and send his finished letters from the Continent at the same rate as Paul is supposed to have done. The impression given by Scott's biographer, John Gibson Lockhart, suggests this is just what he did:

He threw his daily letters to his wife into the form of communications meant for [the] imaginary group ... These epistles, after having been devoured by the little circle at Abbotsford, were transmitted to Major John Scott, his mother, and Miss Rutherford, in Edinburgh; from their hands they passed to those of James Ballantyne [and] the copy ultimately sent to the press consisted in great part, of the identical sheets that had successively reached Melrose through the post.^{fn4}

In practice, however, the writing followed an altogether different and more conventional procedure. The half-dozen or so letters he wrote to his wife Charlotte while he was away do not appear to have been 'thrown' into such a form, nor passed from hand to hand, as Lockhart describes. Instead, by the end of August, Scott had sent two packets of 'copy' directly to James Ballantyne, one of them containing the first two of *Paul's Letters*, and the other his finished poem, *The Field of Waterloo*. An earlier packet sent from Brussels - its contents unknown - had gone astray. Moreover, he had by then decided to send nothing further until he arrived home. 'There is much risque of miscarriage [and] I will not trust [Paul's] lucubrations till I get to some faithful post master.' He had, besides, found it impossible to write anything of substance during the three weeks he spent in Paris. 'There is a tumult in this town from morning till night beyond what it is possible for you to

imagine,' he told Ballantyne. 'Fleet Street at noon is a dead calm to it. I am making large notes which is all I can do in the tempest.'^{fn5} All this meant that the bulk of the book would have to be written after his return, putting the original publication date out of the question. This despite an advertisement in the *Caledonian Mercury* that had appeared on 25 August, that 'PAUL'S LETTERS to HIS KINSFOLKS' [sic] was already 'In the Press'.

It was not until 24 September that he reached Abbotsford and was able to resume his literary work: correcting proofs of *The Field of Waterloo*, writing a review of Jane Austin's latest novel *Emma*, and completing the book that Constable's advertisement had prematurely promised the public a month earlier. Other works were being published about the most celebrated event of the age and it was felt necessary to get *Paul's Letters* out before either the market was sated or the topicality faded. In November, Constable suggested increasing the initial print run from 3,000 to 6,000 and Scott readily agreed: 'It is a work of momentary interest & the more that can be made of it at first the better.'^{fn6} By the end of the year it was finished. 'I'm done, thank God,' he told Ballantyne, 'with the long yarns of the most prosy of Apostles - Paul.'^{fn7} Published in early January 1816, the first edition of 6,000 was exhausted in just three weeks. Second and third editions in the same year, and a fourth in 1817, comprised a further 3,000.

Although published anonymously, the book's title page did not bear the teasing attribution, 'by the author of *Waverley*', as the previous year's *Guy Mannering* had done, and as all his subsequent works of fiction would until his authorship of the 'Waverley Novels' was no longer even an open secret. Despite a 'supposititious' narrator and correspondents, it was, from the start, intended and marketed as a faithful piece of reportage. Besides, any pretence at 'cover' in this instance was comprehensively blown on publication when both the *Morning Post* and

Chronicle of 29 January 1816 announced: 'It is known that Mr Walter Scott is the author of *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk*.'

^{fn1} *Life* V, p. 54. Ballantyne underestimated the paper costs and the book was published at 460 pages.

^{fn2} *Life* III, p. 296.

^{fn3} *Life* V, p. 54.

^{fn4} *Life* V, pp. 55-6.

^{fn5} Scott to James Ballantyne, 30 August 1815, *Letters* IV, p. 87.

^{fn6} Scott to Constable, 3 November 1815, *Letters* IV, p. 115.

^{fn7} Scott to Ballantyne, 29 December 1815, *Letters* IV, p. 147.

PAUL'S LETTERS

TO

HIS KINSFOLK.



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1816.

PAUL'S LETTERS TO HIS KINSFOLK

LETTER I.

PAUL TO HIS SISTER MARGARET.

It is three long weeks since I left the old mansion-house, which, for years before, has not found me absent for three days, and yet no letter has assured its quiet inmates and neighbours whether my curiosity has met its punishment. Methinks I see the evening circle assembled, and anxiously expressing their doubts and fears on account of the adventurous traveller. The Major will talk of the dangers of outposts and free corps, and shall be somewhat disappointed, if the Major has displayed alacrity in putting his double-barrel in order for the moors; or if the Laird has shewn his usual solicitude for a seasonable sprinkling of rain to refresh the turnip-field. Peter's speculations on politics, and his walks to the bowling-green, have been darkened, doubtless, and saddened by the uncertainty of my fate; and I even suspect the Parson has spared his flock one *Seventhly*¹ of his text in his anxiety upon my account.

For you, my dear Margaret, can I doubt the interest you have given me in your affections from the earliest period of recollection, when we pulled *gowans*² together upon the green, until the moment when my travelling trunk, packed by your indefatigable exertions, stood ready to be locked; but, ere the key could be turned, reversing the frolics of the enchanted chest of the Merchant Abudah³, sprung once

more open, as if in derision of your labours. To you, therefore, in all justice, belong the first fruits of my correspondence; and while I dwell upon topics personal to myself, and therefore most interesting to you, do not let our kind friends believe that I have forgotten my promise, to send each of them, from foreign parts, that species of information with which each is most gratified. No! the Major shall hear of more and bloodier battles than ever were detailed to Young Norval by his tutor the Hermit.⁴ The Laird shall know all I can tell him on the general state of the country. Peter shall be refreshed with politics, and the Minister with polemics; that is, if I can find any thing of the latter description worth sending; for if ever there existed a country without a sense of religion of any kind, it is that of France. The churches indeed remain, but the worship to which they are dedicated has as little effect upon the minds of the people, as that of the heathen Pantheon on the inhabitants of modern Rome. I must take Ovid's maxim, '*Tamen excute nullum;*'⁵ and endeavour to describe the effects which the absence of this salutary restraint upon our corrupt and selfish passions, of this light, which extends our views beyond the bounds of a transitory world, has produced upon this unhappy country. More of this, however, hereafter. My first letter is addressed to you, my dear sister, and must therefore be personal.

Even your partiality would be little interested in my journey through England, or the circumstances attending my embarkation. And of my passage, it is enough to say, that sea-sick I was even unto the uttermost. All your fifteen infallible recipes proved unavailing. I could not brook the sight of lavender-drops; gingerbread-nuts were detestable to my eyes, and are so to my recollection even at this moment. I could as soon have swallowed the horns of the Arch-fiend himself as the dose of hartshorn; and for the great goblet of sea-water, 'too much of water had I, poor Ophelia.'⁶ In short, he that would see as much misery, and

as much selfishness, as can well be concentrated, without any permanent evil being either done or suffered, I invite him to hire a berth aboard a packet. Delicacy is lost; sympathy is no more; the bands of love and friendship are broken; one class of passengers eat and drink joyously, though intermingled with another, who are expressing their inward grievances, in a manner, which, in any other situation, seldom fails to excite irresistible sympathy. The captain and the mate, comforters by profession, indeed exhort you, from time to time, to be of good cheer, and recommend a glass of grog, or possibly a pipe of tobacco, or it may be a morsel of fat bacon, to allay the internal commotion; but it is unnecessary to say how ill the remedies apply to the disorder. In short, if you are sick, sick you must be; and can have little better comfort than in reflecting that the evil must be of short duration, though, were you to judge from your immediate feelings, you might conceive your life was likely to end first. As I neither met with a storm nor sea-fight, I do not know what effect they might produce upon a sea-sick patient; but such is the complete annihilation of energy; such the headache, the nausea, and depression of spirits, that I think any stimulus, short of the risque of being shot or drowned, would fail of rousing him to any exertion. The best is, that arrival on the land proves a certain remedy for the sorrows of the sea; and I do not think that even your *materia medica* could supply any other.

Suppose your brother then landed among the mynheers and yafrows of Holland and Belgium, as it is now the fashion to call what, before our portentous times, was usually named Flanders. Strange sights meet his eyes; strange voices sound in his ears; and yet, by a number of whimsical associations, he is eternally brought back to the land of his nativity. The Flemings, in particular, resemble the Scotch in the cast of their features, the sound of their language, and, apparently, in their habits of living, and of

patient industry. They are, to be sure, a century at least behind in *costume* and manners; but the old chateau, consisting of two or three narrow houses, joined together by the gables, with a slender round turret ascending in the centre of the building, for the purpose of containing the staircase, is completely in the old style of Scottish dwelling-houses. Then the avenue, and the acre or two of ground, planted with fruit-trees in straight lines; the garden, with high hedges, clipped by the gardener's art into verdant walls; the intermixture of statues and vases; the fountains and artificial pieces of water, may still be seen in some of our ancient mansions; and, to my indifferent taste, are no unnatural decorations in the immediate vicinity of a dwelling-place, and infinitely superior to the meagreness of bare turf and gravel. At least they seem peculiarly appropriate to so flat a country as Belgium, which, boasting no objects of natural beauty or grandeur, and being deprived, in a great measure, even of the grace of living streams of water, must necessarily supply these deficiencies by the exertions of art. Nor does their taste appear to have changed since the days of William III. There seem to be few new houses built; and the old chateaux, and grounds around them, are maintained in the original style in which they were constructed. Indeed, an appearance of antiquity is one of the most distinguishing features which strikes the traveller in the Low Countries. Dates, as far back as the fifteenth, and even fourteenth centuries, are inscribed upon the front of many of the houses both in the country and in the towns and villages. And although I offended your national pride, my dear sister, when I happened to observe, that the Scotch, who are supposed to boast more than other nations of their ancient descent, in reality know less of their early history than any other people in Europe, yet, I think, you will allow, that our borough towns afford few visible monuments of the high claims we set up to early civilization.